

Child Placement Review Board

OF THE STATE OF DELAWARE



2010 Annual Report

July 2009 - June 2010

OVERVIEW



With 1,182 children in its foster care system in FY2010, Delaware is frequently cited as a leader in introducing and sustaining successful programming for the children in its care. Progress requires vision and energy on the part of the people and agencies established to serve these children. It requires budgetary support and effective legislative leadership from the General Assembly and careful, compassionate consideration by those in the Family Court system.

As a unique element in the child welfare system, the Child Placement Review Board (CPRB) functions at both the individual and systemic levels. The CPRB has a number of responsibilities, including

- Conducting individual reviews of children in care.
- Advocating for the needs of individual children in care.
- Serving as a citizen-based, independent monitor of the system as a whole.
- Advocating for workable solutions to system-wide needs and problems.
- Pressing for adequate funding to meet the needs of this vulnerable population.

In FY2010, the CPRB conducted 785 reviews of 609 children in foster care. Most of these children are in the care of the Division of Family Services (DFS) and also receive services through the Division of Prevention and Behavioral Health Services (PBHS), formerly known as the Division of Child Mental Health (CMH). Both agencies are part of the Department of Services for Children, Youth, and Their Families (DSCYF). In addition, the CPRB conducted 42 reviews of adjudicated youth aged 13 or older who have been remanded to residential treatment facilities. These children are the responsibility of the Division of Youth Rehabilitative Services (YRS), another DSCYF agency. After conducting DFS or YRS reviews, the CPRB submits reports to interested parties and to Family Court. The added dimension of CPRB comments offers Family Court a broader evaluation of a child's needs and situation than could be obtained from any single agency's perspective.

Older children present both complex challenges and the opportunity for developing creative solutions to those challenges. In FY2010, 38 percent of the children in foster care

were 15 years of age or older. In fact, the 15-17 age group is the largest in the system, with 255 children in this age range in foster care; this is 22 percent of the total foster care population. This report will direct special attention to the needs of the 15- to 17-year-old group and programming designed to address those needs.

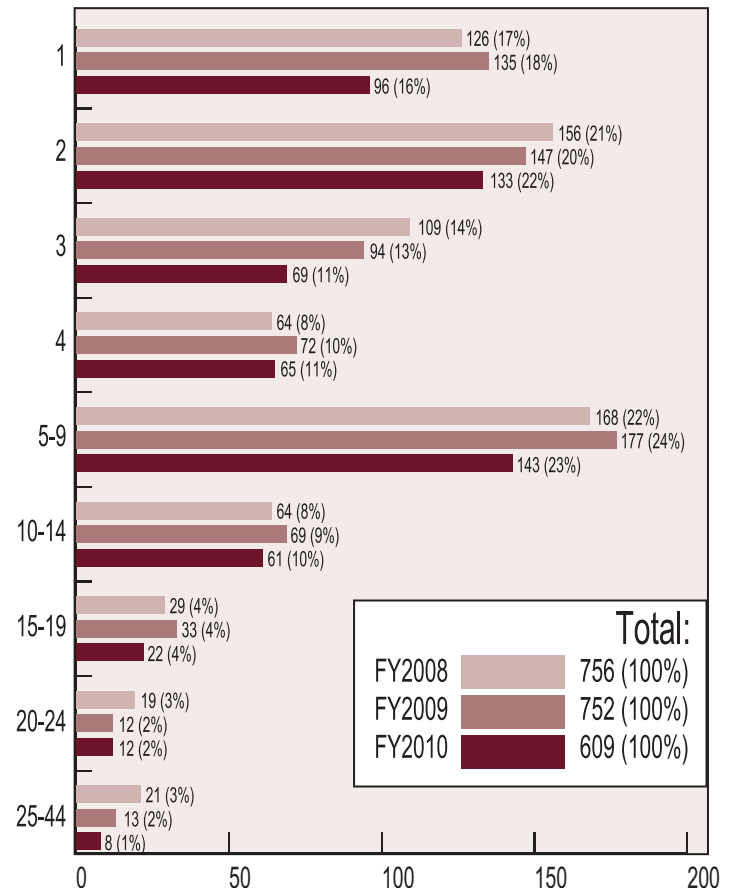
REVIEW AND FINDINGS

The CPRB conducts reviews of children in foster care and adjudicated youth. It also administers the Ivyane D.F. Davis Scholarship and partners with DFS to manage Delaware's participation in the federal Educational Training Vouchers (ETV) initiative offering post-secondary educational support.

Children in Foster Care

The major factors affecting foster children and their quest for permanency are the number of times they are admitted to the system, the number of placements to which they are assigned, the permanency goals developed for them, and the circumstances under which they leave the system.

Number of Placements



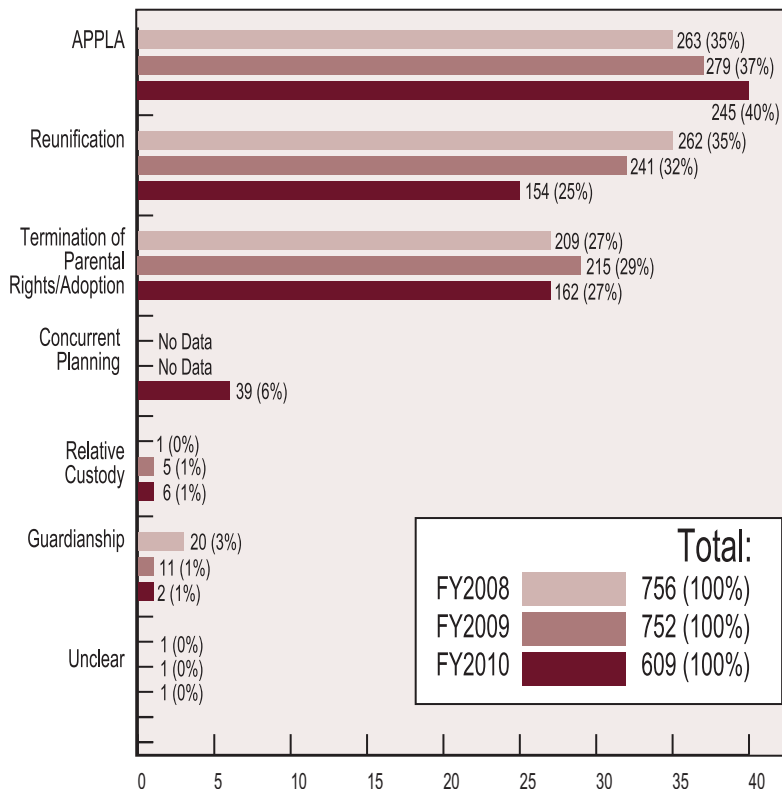
In most situations, DFS's initial expectation is that family members will be able to overcome temporary instability and the child can be reunited with the family. Sometimes a relative or another adult with a close relationship to the child may

be a possible long-term guardian. For other children, adoption becomes the outcome of choice.

Every child in foster care needs and deserves permanency, but transience is more of a norm for many of these children, especially those for whom foster care is perceived as the only option. Those children are assigned the goal of Alternative Planned Permanent Living Arrangement, or APPLA, meaning that permanent foster care is their life until they age out of the system. It is important to remember that long-term foster care does not mean that the child is in the same foster home year after year. As the previous chart shows, many children endure multiple moves—and multiple disruptions—in their foster care history. These moves make their situation anything but permanent.

The chart below summarizes DFS permanency goals for children in foster care who were reviewed by the CPRB. These goals are of primary importance because they determine what actions case workers take to shape a child’s future. The CPRB is concerned about the steadily increasing use of the APPLA goal.

Permanency Goals



In FY2010, 507 children exited the system; this is 42 percent of the children who were in foster care during the year and demonstrates the fluid nature of the foster care population.

While only two percent of children have a permanency goal of guardianship, exit data show that twenty-two percent of children leaving the system do so with a guardian. This suggests that if plans for reunification collapse, DFS promptly begins to explore the option of finding members of the

extended family who would make suitable guardians. Energetic identification of options other than APPLA helps lessen the amount of time a child spends in care.

The data on exit outcomes continue to convey the fact that 24 percent of those leaving foster care simply aged out of the system. It must be regarded as a systemic challenge when permanency has not been achieved for nearly one quarter of those leaving the system.

Every child still in foster care deserves basic services, which certainly include educational access and stability. However, Delaware’s record on education for foster children raises serious questions about how the instructional needs of these children are being met and how lapses in education for foster children can impact overall educational attainment in the state. Data from the National Foster Care Coalition show that, at the time of their reviews, fourteen percent of Delaware’s eligible foster children were not enrolled in early childhood educational programming, and five percent of eligible foster children were not attending any school regularly.

Adjudicated Youth

In addition to reviewing children in foster care, the CPRB reviews young people who have been remanded by Family Court to residential treatment facilities to address the causes of their delinquency. Supervised by YRS, adjudicated youth reviewed by the CPRB are in Level III and IV facilities (secured by staff). During FY2010, the CPRB conducted 42 such reviews for YRS.

Thirty-one percent of those reviewed (13 cases) were in behavior modification facilities, and sixty-nine percent (29 cases) were in facilities specific to sex offenders. Returning adjudicated youth to their community after treatment is a difficult problem. Barriers include dependency or neglect in the family, the offender’s overall lack of progress, and, among sex offenders, the need to enter the sex offender registry, which can determine where the offender can live.

Children in Mixed Settings

The CPRB continues to be responsible for completing the two-month review of placements that mix adjudicated and non-adjudicated youth in the same residential facility or foster home. The purpose of these reviews is to ensure that non-adjudicated youth are not put at risk by the presence of adjudicated youth in the mixed setting. In FY2010, the CPRB completed 22 mixing reviews.

Continuing Post-Secondary Scholarship Support

The CPRB administers the Ivyane D.F. Davis Scholarship and partners with DFS to administer the federal Educational and Training Vouchers (ETV) program, both of which support post-secondary education for Delaware’s former foster

children. These programs can be used to motivate children in foster care to embrace the opportunity for college or vocational education.

In FY2010, 51 recipients received grants with a value of \$132,659.70. Twenty-nine students used their grants at two-year colleges, and seventeen attended four-year colleges, with two graduating this year. Five award recipients attended vocational schools.

PROGRESS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Progress in Permanency

The quest for permanency must be central to program development within DFS. This year, several positive steps emerged. This section discusses progress and includes recommendations for expanded impact.

Concurrent planning. The CPRB recognizes an increase in the use of this unique permanency goal, designed to minimize both disruption and length of time in care. Ideally, concurrent planning is established when a child first enters care. Normally, reunification is the primary goal, but if significant barriers to reunification have been identified, adoption is cited as the concurrent goal. Concurrent planning allows DFS to place a child directly into a foster home where the foster parents have expressed an interest in adopting.

Increased flexibility in adoptions. DFS case workers have reached out more creatively to specialized resources and options in their efforts to find permanent homes when family reunification is not possible. One initiative involves working with adoption agencies serving military families who were once considered too transient to be good candidates for adopting children from foster care. Case workers are also more aggressively seeking members of extended families and existing connections who are not related as resources for guardianship or adoption. In FY2010, 22 percent of exit outcomes involved relative guardianship, the first year this statistic was tracked.

Permanency recommendations

- Expand the practice of concurrent planning to help children find permanent adoptive homes more quickly.
- Expand support services to foster families who have expressed an interest in adopting. Appropriate services include training and preparation as well as support in the event that reunification does become achievable and the child returns to the birth family.
- Continue to expand creative adoption and guardianship options for children when reunification is unrealistic. This will reduce the number of children who are perceived as 'un-adoptable' and allow them to hope for a permanent home.

Stability in Foster Care

For many children, foster care means more than being separated from their own families; it also means upheaval and disruption as one placement follows another. Programmatic efforts to expand stability can be meaningful to an individual child and can improve the foster care system significantly.

Integrated staffing to sustain placements. Recognizing that the large number of placements endured by some children in foster care is damaging to their emotional health, DFS has included PBHS in integrated planning efforts targeting children entering foster care and some of those already in placements. In these cases, PBHS consults with DFS case workers and foster families to improve screening of foster children, achieve better matches with foster homes, and upgrade access to specialized services, including help with behavioral concerns and treatment compliance.

Maintaining specialized placements. Another initiative to increase a child's sense of permanency involves individual residential treatment (IRT) placements in which a child receives specialized care and support from trained foster parents and PBHS. In the past, children stayed in these intensive placements only as long as the high level of treatment was deemed necessary. Recently, however, PBHS and DFS have worked together to allow children to remain in the IRT home with a reduced level of treatment. The services change within the placement, but the placement does not change for the child. If more intensive services are again required, they can be implemented by PBHS.

Educational stability. According to the report of the National Foster Care Review Coalition, in one six-month period, 52 percent of Delaware's children who entered foster care had to change schools. DFS case workers have made noticeable efforts during FY2010 to keep a child in an existing school when a placement is changed. When a change of school is needed, efforts are directed at making the change when a natural break occurs in the school calendar.

Continuing counselor and/or therapist relationships. In a number of cases, case workers from DFS and PBHS have been able to maintain a foster child's treatment without interruption even when the child has moved from one placement to another. Treatment stability is proving to be an important factor for these children, and the efforts involved in maintaining therapeutic continuity are worthwhile.



Stability recommendations

- Implement the recommendations of the April 2008 Child Protection and Accountability Commission (CPAC) Caseload/Workload Subcommittee to reduce the workload of case workers, who are often overwhelmed by the demands of working with at-risk children and dysfunctional families.
- Reduce the number of placements experienced by foster children. More than half of the children reviewed by the CPRB have four or more placements during their time in care. Frequent moves prevent a child from forming healthy attachments and can compromise the ability to build trust and commitment in the long term.
- Improve the educational access and stability of foster children, implementing strategies to maximize school attendance, reduce school transfers when a placement is entered, and ensure smooth transfers when a change is required.

Services for Older Youth

One mission of the CPRB is to advocate for permanency for all children in care. When no long-term solution is found for them, they age out of foster care and have to survive on their own with the assistance of Independent Living Services (IL), which is minimally funded. The CPRB remains deeply concerned about the number of young people who age out of the foster care system annually—nearly one fourth of all those who left the system. Although the CPRB continues to believe that the child welfare system is failing these children, efforts to improve services to them do deserve credit, and an emphasis on educational attainment is one way to improve the ability of these teens.

The STEPS program. Stairways to Encourage Personal Success, STEPS, was initiated by a DFS work group to help older children in long-term foster care take ownership of their futures. STEPS gives 17-year-olds the opportunity to chair a meeting of their own caregivers, social worker, and other interested parties. The purpose of the meeting is to develop strategies for completing high school or a GED, attending college or vocational school, identifying employment opportunities, obtaining affordable housing, and designing a workable path to independence.

Affordable housing for those who age out. Two new initiatives have been added to the continuum of residential support services available to those aging out of foster care. In one, DFS negotiated with the state's public housing agencies to allow eligible teens to enter the waiting list for public housing before they reach the age of 18. In the other, DFS obtained 30 vouchers for Section 8 housing and distributed these state-wide to youth who were aging out, again shortening the wait for affordable housing.

Recommendations for services for older youth

- Reduce the number of children aging out by broadening the perception of who is adoptable. Allow more children in the 13-15 age range to be considered for adoption or guardianship, especially when members of their extended family or non-relative resources are available.
- Broaden implementation of the STEPS program and explore the advantages of extending the program to teens before they reach age 17 and have little time to exercise IL options before aging out.
- Ensure that the STEPS program includes an emphasis on completing high school or obtaining a GED, the eligibility criteria for the Davis Scholarship and ETV program.
- Analyze the success of programs supporting affordable housing options for those who age out and determine how the scope of these programs can be increased.



LOOKING AHEAD

The CPRB is unique in the child welfare system in having both a dual makeup (trained citizen volunteers and professional staff) and a dual perspective (individual children and systemic overview). As an advocate for permanency for individual children, the CPRB is also an advocate for systems that offer stability and permanency to all children in care. Building on the findings from the last year, this report points to areas of focus for the coming year:

- The ongoing need for stability in placements and services.
- The role of concurrent planning and other initiatives in increasing adoptions.
- The potential for improved services and support when social workers are not overwhelmed.
- The urgency attached to improved planning, programming, and affordable housing for teens aging out of foster care.

CPRB Members

The work of the CPRB is dependent on the dedication of its volunteer members. The citizens who serve on the CPRB bring a diverse range of professional and personal experience to their task, and the depth and consistency of CPRB reviews are a mark of their dedication. This year, the members of the CPRB contributed 3,437 hours to the service of Delaware's foster children.

New Castle 1: Linda Hartzel, Presiding Officer.
Marion Gibbs, Anne Kauffman, Mary Morgan, Quenna Neal.

New Castle 2: Nancy Czeiner, Presiding Officer.
Caroline Bither, Lou Himmelreich, Katie Ryan.

New Castle 3: Sandra Countley, Presiding Officer.
Lillian McGowan, Bill Miller, Sunnie Moon, Carol Stewart.

New Castle 4: Robert Hamilton, Presiding Officer.
Rita Anderson, Phyllis Faulkner, Helen Rubin.

New Castle 5: Jeanmarie Leonard, Presiding Officer.
Tanya Bell-Hynson, Bonita Herring, Elma Jackson, Lisa Seel.

New Castle 6: Kellie Fresolone, Presiding Officer.
Christy DiGuglielmo, Mildred Hamilton, Mary Jane Johnson, Carolyn Karney.

New Castle 8: Judith Miller, Presiding Officer.
Arlene Cronin, Patricia Forster, Mary Smith.

New Castle 9: Susan Schneider, Presiding Officer.
Mary Angerer, Joan Chandler.

Kent 1: Mike Rezac, Presiding Officer.
William Moyer, David Miller, Cindy Montejo, Rodney Smith.

Kent 2: Gail Allen, Presiding Officer.
Wilberta Lewis, Candice Swetland.

Kent 3: Mary Austria, Presiding Officer.
Candace Mebane, Linda Paradee, Dana Stonesifer.

Kent/Sussex: Virginia VanSciver, Presiding Officer.
Judy Mellen, Ray Moore.

Sussex 1: Tiffany Derrickson, Presiding Officer.
Louise Henry, Sandra Lord.

Sussex 3: John Michael Norton, Presiding Officer.
Gary Breakwell, Cora Norwood Selby, Ruth Tull.

The CPRB is grateful for the service of these members, most of whom served multiple terms.

FY2010 Resignations

Janice Baly, O.D. Basinski, Lenora Bennefield, Charles Carter, Dave Dagenais, Nancy D'Orazio, Evelyn Figueroa, Mary Hauck, Patricia Lyons, Bruce Morris, Tambra Parker, Don Schneck, Ann Southmayd, Barbara Williams.

FY2010 New Board Members: Joe Dell'Olio, Patricia Forster, Mary Smith.

Executive Committee

William L. Murray, Board Chair; Virginia VanSciver, First Vice Chair; Martha Brooks, Second Vice Chair; Bonnie Maull, Personnel Officer; Barbara Blair, Joe Dell'Olio, Carolyn Karney, Katie Kramedas, Judy Mellen, Judy Miller, John Michael Norton.

CPRB Staff

Julia Pearce, Executive Director
Linda Lampinen, Review and Training Supervisor; Lisa Cookson, Megan O'Brien, Denise Partridge, and Amy Wilburn, Review Coordinators; Nancy Ripple and Teresa Willoughby, Support Staff.



The commitment of CPRB members is expressed by one long-serving volunteer who said, "I've been on the Board for 29 years. I'm committed to this organization because I truly believe that obtaining permanency for kids is critical in order for them to be successful adults."